



United Services, Inc.

Creating healthy communities

Testimony Regarding

HB 6659, AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025,

and Making Appropriations Therefor

Judicial Department Budget

Appropriations Committee

February 24, 2023

Good evening Senators Osten, Winfield & Berthel, Representatives Walker, Candelaria & Callahan, and members of the committee. United Services, Inc. provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Northeast Connecticut. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others. We are a member organization of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV).

Unfortunately, we come before you again this year to ask for your continued assistance with a federal funding issue facing all victim service providers in Connecticut, including United Services, Inc. Connecticut, like all states, is continuing to face a 50% reduction in federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants. VOCA funds some of our core services including court-based advocacy, advocacy around basic needs, and advocacy with law enforcement, so a reduction of this magnitude would devastate our ability to meet the needs of survivors.

First, we want to thank Governor Lamont for his proposal to allocate \$13,175,000 in FY24 from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund (CSFRF) to the Judicial Branch to offset these continued reductions in VOCA funding. This amount keeps all of Connecticut's victim service providers level-funded for FY24, including \$3,772,000 specifically for domestic violence services, including those provided by United Services, Inc.

We are asking this committee to support the Governor's FY24 proposal while also ensuring that United Services Domestic Violence Program, CCADV and each of the state's 18 domestic violence service providers get the \$3,772,000 we need in FY25 by including an additional \$20 million in FY25 to keep the state's entire victim services system whole.

VOCA, which is funded through the fines and fees generated by federal prosecution, has experienced significant declines in deposits beginning in 2018. You will hear from our umbrella organization, CCADV, regarding the specific challenges facing the federal VOCA Fund ([click here to access the CCADV factsheet](#)). In short, it appears as though VOCA is no longer a stable funding source for victim services, at least for the foreseeable future.

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United Services, Inc. would like to explain what a 50% reduction to our VOCA funding would mean for the survivors we serve in “the quiet corner” of Connecticut. VOCA funding supports our advocates who served over 850 victims last year. Services include counseling, crisis intervention, domestic violence education, safety planning, advocacy, case management, and referrals to other resources and live saving programs.

VOCA-funded services allowed an Advocate working in the Criminal Court to work with a victim who was assessed to be in high-danger after law enforcement completed a Lethality Assessment Program screen. The Advocate provided the victim with safety planning, options for program services, education around Protective Orders and the Global Positioning System (GPS), applying for a Temporary Restraining Order and completed a referral to CT Legal Aid securing legal representation. The Advocate filed the victim’s input with the States Attorney’s Office and informed them the victim would like to speak in front of the Judge. The Advocate supported the victim in writing a victim impact statement to read at the time of sentencing, describing how the abuse impacted her and her children’s lives.

VOCA funding allows for each victim to receive supportive, trauma-informed services they need and deserve in order to get back on their feet and work towards thriving. If the 50% reduction were to take place, United Services, Inc. would be in the position of eliminating VOCA funded positions and therefore fewer victims would be served. The consequences to victims and their children would be dire. They would be less safe and their basic needs, including housing, employment and their mental health would be at risk. Generational trauma would undoubtedly continue, perpetuating the cycle of violence and putting more youth at risk of becoming victims themselves.

We know that the VOCA funding gap is not a problem that was created by this or any other state. The support we received last year from the General Assembly and Governor Lamont to address the funding gap has been essential in our ability to meet the growing needs of survivors. Domestic violence advocates are often the only ones there for a survivor in their time of crisis. They are the only ones there to guide the survivor through the court process and advocate for them when they are at their most vulnerable, dealing with trauma in the immediate aftermath of an assault and arrest. We urge you to allocate funding in both FY24 and FY25 to ensure that domestic violence services and all victim services remain whole as we continue to deal with a 50% reduction in federal VOCA funding.

We thank you for your continued leadership on this matter.

Respectfully,

Heather Victoria, LCSW

Intensive Services Division Director

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